

Faith That Overcomes

Our Identity in Christ

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Turn with me in your Bibles to 1 Peter chapter 3. We pick up again our exposition of 1 Peter. We spent four Sundays in Isaiah. It's kind of a break from 1 Peter and then to celebrate Christmas and the New Year. We come back to the first epistle of Peter this morning in chapter 3, verses 13 to 17. The title of the message is, "Faith That Overcomes." Faith That Overcomes. Moving to this new section in verses 13 to 17, last month we were in 3:8 to 12, which serves something as a hinge in the book of 1 Peter. I mentioned, just to remind you quickly, of the structure of 1 Peter. Peter, in the background, Peter is writing in 63 AD, most scholars believe, about a year before a major persecution breaks out against Christians. So in the providence of God, he writes this letter. Obviously, Peter doesn't know the future, but the Holy Spirit does, and the Holy Spirit inspires him to write these words that are amazingly timely in preparing the people of God for persecution that is about to break out. The great fire of Rome happens July of 64 AD and Emperor Nero looking for a scapegoat chooses Christians as those he wants to blame. And so they're going to experience persecution emanating out from Rome throughout the Roman Empire and Peter writes to believers in Asia Minor to prepare them. And already they're experiencing opposition, already they're experiencing persecution, but it's going to even get worse. And so he writes to them to strengthen them to stand firm in the midst of increasingly dark days.

We noted that the structure then of the letter, when you look at the overall structure of 1 Peter, really breaks down into two major sections. 1:1 through chapter 2 verse 10, Peter focuses on the identity of the believer and the question he's asking or answering in the whole book is, how can you bear up in increasingly dark days? How can you be faithful to God and to Christ and to do so in the face of increasing opposition and hostility? How do you do that? Well, the first section, chapter 1:1 to 2:10, you need to know who you are. It's about your identity. That's that first section of the book, know who you are. He makes a point of saying that if you belong to Christ, if you profess the name of Jesus, and you truly know him, you have been born again. Chapter 1, verse 3, born again to a living hope. Chapter 1 verse 22, you've been born again not of perishable seed but of imperishable seed. You are someone who has been born again. You have a new life. That's who you are. He talks about the fact that we are holy. Chapter 1, I spent some time on that in chapter 1, 15 to 18, that is set apart unto God. Know who you are. You're someone who has new life given to you from God. You're someone who's been set apart

unto God. That's what it means to be holy, set apart from the world unto God for his purposes.

Not only that, he uses the image of a temple in chapter 2, verses 4 and 5 in this first section. We're still walking through the first section. Knowing who you are. Says you are the temple of the living God. You're a priest, you're to offer up sacrifices. He's saying, not only have you been born again, not only have you been set apart unto God, you are to be devoted to worship if you belong to Jesus. This is who you are. You are someone set apart under worship. And then he finishes that section with four wonderful descriptive terms in chapter 2, verse 9. You are a chosen race, a holy nation, a royal priesthood, a people belonging to God. He's saying, listen, who are you? And I love the way he does this, a chosen race, the word race there, family, your kindred, you know, how do we know who we are? How do we define who we are? So often we think of our family, right? We think of, you know, the particular strengths of our family, the loves of our family, that's who we are. Well, he says, now you're the family of God. That's who you are. We think about who we are nationally, you're a holy nation. We say, this is where I come from, I'm an American, I'm Italian or whatever country someone comes from, that's part of their identity. If you belong to Jesus Christ, now your identity is you're a part of the holy nation of God, superseding every other element of identity. You're a royal priesthood. You have been set apart as a kingly priesthood. Again, your business is worship. You belong to God.

Know who you are so that you can be faithful in the midst of dark times. That's the first section of the book. And then chapter 2 verse 11 to the end, chapter 5 verse 14, it basically turns the corner to not only identity but now responsibility. What are you and I to do? What are we responsible to do? We need to keep our eyes on who we are and what we're to do if we're to bear up because the world gets darker, life gets tougher, and yet if you know who you are and what you're to do, you can overcome. And so that's what he's, we're in that section of the book that's dealing with that and he basically says, we're going to see again that what we're to do is we're to do good. We need to go about doing good, that is living our lives according to a new standard that we have. Now that we've been born again, if you know Jesus Christ, you've been born again, you have repented of your sins, you placed your faith in Christ, you're hoping in him, that his love for you, his death at Calvary is what gives you a right to come into the presence of God. Nothing in you, but all about Jesus. If that's who you are, now you are to live out a different life, not in order to be saved, but because you already are saved. And that's what we're to do, we're to do good, and we're going to see that, and as you do good, you're going to encounter opposition. And how do you overcome when you encounter opposition? That's really what we're going to look at in this next section.

So chapter three, verse 13.

13 Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? 14 But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. **AND DO NOT FEAR THEIR INTIMIDATION, AND DO NOT BE TROUBLED,** 15 but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being

ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; 16 and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame. 17 For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.

Let's pray together.

Father, as we come to Your word, we come as Your children, Lord, redeemed by the blood of Jesus, grateful for a new standing but, Lord, we come as needy people. We need Your Holy Spirit to open the eyes of our hearts to grant us more faith, more repentance, and help us to walk in Your truth so that Christ might be exalted. We pray in His name. Amen.

So faith that overcomes, overcoming persecution. That's really the focus now. Peter is preparing the saints for persecution in this letter and a key theme is the suffering that happens, and so I want to still look at how we can have a faith that overcomes. This morning we'll look at three points as we begin to unpack verses 13 to 17. We're really going to just get through about halfway through verse 14 this morning.

The first thing is we have a clear calling. We have a clear calling. When he says, "Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good?" The key phrase here is "if you prove zealous for what is good." He's basically saying, look, what I've been telling you in this part of the letter is that you are to be zealous to do good. So if you prove zealous, then something's going to happen but I want to make sure you understand, remember, that you must be zealous to do good. That is the main point. In fact, the word "zealous" in English, the word "zeal" comes from, it's actually a transliteration of the Greek word here, which is related to the Greek word for zeal. It comes from a word "zeo," which means "to be hot or to boil." So zeal, the physical reality that led to the figurative meaning of zeal, the physical picture was like a boiling pot of water. It's hot, it's boiling, and that is what zeal is. Zeal is fervency, intensity, earnestness. So he says, if you prove zealous for what is good, that is you prove fervent, earnest, intensely focused on doing good, who is there to harm you?

He's going to say that there are some people that are going to try to harm you, but the message is they cannot harm you, not in reality, but we start with, we're to be zealous for what is good. That's what the Christian life, we are called, once you come to know Jesus Christ and you are saved, not by your works, you're saved in spite of your works, you're saved by the works of Jesus Christ, his perfect righteous life, his atoning death, substitutionary, sacrificial, bearing the sins of everyone who'd ever believe, punished in our place, rising from the dead, he gives us his righteousness, that's how we are saved. We're not saved by works, but we're saved unto works. We're saved to do good works, and we're to be fervent and earnest in that. That's what he's been saying, actually, in the letter of 1 Peter. If you look back at chapter 2, I mentioned the section changes at chapter 2, verse 11, and he basically lays out here in verse 11 and 12 of chapter 2 what the calling

is. "Beloved, I urge you," it's 2:11, 1 Peter 2:11, "Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles." That is the key clause, "Keep your behavior excellent." Your behavior, your way of life. A key word in the book of 1 Peter is this word translated often behavior, sometimes conduct, sometimes way of life occurring seven times in the book. It is the thrust, he's saying, look, now that you've come to Christ, your way of life is to be different. Your behavior is to be different.

The calling of the Christian is to live out what God has done inside of you, to live it out in every area of life. Keep your behavior excellent. Your way of life, the way that you live, everything that you do, make it excellent. This is a word that can be translated "good." Your behavior is to be good. Here it's the idea of good is beautiful. There's two words that Peter uses and the New Testament uses for "good," this word here in 2:12, keep your behavior excellent, excellent translates good, it is the word of aesthetic beauty. It's your to live lives and what you do is to be aesthetically beautiful. What he's talking about, when you do what God calls you to do, it will be aesthetically beautiful. Keep your behavior excellent.

Now, they're going to slander you, but you keep your behavior so excellent, that in the things in which they slander you, 2:12, as evildoers, maybe because of your good deeds, you're doing good works, again, beautiful, attractive, as they observe them glorify God in the day of visitation. And then that sets off where he basically says, look, now I want to show you how to do good works in every area of your life. This is what the Christian is called to and so he says, in the area of your interactions with governing authorities, 2:13 to 17, keep your behavior excellent in the way you deal with authority in your life, particularly the government. It's going to be a challenge. You're going to experience opposition from the government. He knows the people to whom he writes living in the Roman Empire under provincial governors are going to experience difficulty. Keep your behavior excellent among them, that is, submit yourselves to every institution for the Lord's sake.

Then in 2:18 to 20, he says, so not only in the area of government be excellent, but in the area of your employment, servants be submissive to your masters with all respect. In your workplace, in the way you respond to unjust treatment at work, even when you suffer, be submissive to your employer because you trust God. And then he's going to go in chapter 3 verses 1 to 6 into the realm of the family. So government, employment, and family and he's going to say, "Wives, even when you're married to an ungodly man, you be submissive to him. Men, you are to be submissive to God and love your wife." And you're to show, what he's basically saying is, look, when you become a Christian, and when you and I became Christians, God says, look, the work that I'm calling you to do each day is to look at every sphere of life and be changed, in an ongoing way, be changed by the grace of God and the word of God so that the way that you live in every sphere of life is dramatically different than how you used to live. That's the calling of the Christian life. That is the clear calling, to do good works, good deeds, to show the difference.

This is what Jesus said when he says in Matthew 5:16, let your light so shine before men, that they may see your what? Your good deeds and glorify your Father which is in heaven. The light shining is you and I changing the way we live. It's being different in the way you relate to your spouse. That is the calling of God to you today. Change the way you relate to your spouse and make it more like Christ, whether you're a wife or a husband, clear direction. It applies obviously to children, the way you relate to your parents. He's saying in the home, if you belong to Jesus, how is that making a difference? In the way at work, how is it making a difference? In the way you relate to governing authorities, how is it making a difference? And the job every day is for us to be going to work, not just going to work at work, but going to work at home, going to work with our relation to the government, going to work at work, the work is doing good, conforming our lives to the will of God by the power of the Holy Spirit. That's why we're here. That's what we're to do. That's the clear calling.

So he says, back to our verse, chapter 3:13, he's assuming we are zealous to do good. We must be. That's the calling of the Christian. Those who claim to name the name of Christ but are not zealous to do good, are not living consistent with that claim. In fact, look with me, turn back from 1 Peter, back toward the front of the Bible, a few books, past Hebrews to Titus. It's right after 2 Timothy, Titus. Titus 2:14. Let's just read 11 to 14. This is a beautiful passage, the whole passage here. This is what happened. Titus, Paul writing to Titus, the young pastor, reminding him of the glory of the gospel and what God's purpose is. Titus 2:11, "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus," verse 14 is the key, "who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds." Zealous for good works. Christ has redeemed us, bought us back. He saved us. But in the true believer, the call is clear, we are to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and we're to seek to live differently.

So we turn away from the way we've always lived and we live in a new way by the power of the word of God, the power of the Holy Spirit. That's the calling of the Christian life. So it is, that's our work every day is to get up and to figure out how I can do what I'm doing now in a way that honors Jesus Christ. How is this different because of what God has done for me in Christ? Every, the smallest thing, whether you eat or drink, whatever you do, do all for the glory of God. This is something that we forget, you know, mundane things. Like for me, an area that the Lord has convicted me about is I get frustrated in two areas particularly. I mean, there are a lot of areas I get frustrated, but two that jump out at me when I think about it is when technology doesn't work. You know, isn't that ridiculous anyway? Remember how hard it was to do everything we used to do before like last year? I mean, 20 years ago, you had to wait for everything. Remember when you would call somebody on the phone and you would get a busy signal? You call again, get a busy signal, call again 30 minutes later, you get a busy signal. Couldn't do anything so you had to wait and you didn't get all been out of shape. It's like, this is common. It's what happens. Nowadays, if you can't get somebody right away, you're like, well, what's going on? Well, technology when it doesn't work and the other thing is when I'm doing repairs

or something around the house, it's always an adventure for me, and so John and I, when working together, he knows sometimes I get frustrated with things and I can see it in my attitude. I'm like, "I can't believe this is not working!" And I get angry. But you know, in reality, one of the things that I need to do is in those moments, what does it look like, how is me not being able to accomplish what I'm trying to accomplish right now because something's not working, maybe the instructions aren't clear, whatever it is, it is a fallen world after all, how does it make a difference that Jesus is my Lord in this moment? Is it making a difference? If it's not, I've got work to do and the good news is we've got lots of work to do. If we look at our lives honestly, listen, you wake up, you got a to-do list that is more than you can get accomplished. I know mine is when we talk about spiritual growth and application.

But that is the work of the Christian life. Be zealous, intensely focused on doing good. That's the work of the Christian life. A clear calling. We're to be doers of the word according to James, not just hearers, doers of the word. That's our clear calling. Be zealous to do good. Secondly, 1 Peter 3, verse 13, a common reaction. A common reaction. We have clear calling, do good, but there is a common reaction and it really is, even though he asked the question, who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? He's asking a rhetorical question that is tremendously comforting once we see it, but he's asking it because it's very relevant to the experience of those to whom he writes. They're not being appreciated and thanked and encouraged by the people around them as they live for Christ. You do good works, you start making your life conform to the word of God, the will of God, I mean, you start living according to... now think about the reality of this. This shows you how it happens. I mean, so someone gets saved, and whatever their predominant sin was, maybe they were a drunkard or a drug addict, maybe they were very promiscuous, maybe they were, you know, someone who was just consumed in all kinds of vain pursuits, and they had friends that were involved in those things, and now they know they can no longer live that way. Maybe they were someone who had, you know, was giving their life to homosexuality, for instance, and now come to Christ and they leave that behind and you see this person who used to be committed to this kind of ungodly life, now turn away from that and pursue the Lord, and this man or this woman who used to not be living according to God's design, now lives according to God's design, gets married, raises a family, lives according to what God says is true, and the world is not going to say, "We applaud you." What are their friends going to say? They're going to hate them. They're going to despise that because it is light and men who live in darkness hate light.

So no matter what area we are conforming our lives to the will of God, it's light, and so the common occurrence is what he describes here, that there's going to be a sense of suffering. Who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good, but even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness? This is a key theme in the letter. You're going to suffer for the sake of righteousness. In fact, you're going to suffer for doing right. Look at just the rest of this passage, 2:15, "sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;" verse 16, "and keep a good conscience so that

in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame." You're slandered and they revile your good works.

You see, you're changing your behavior, you're changing your way of life, lining it up to God's word. It's actually good and beautiful. It's actually good and beneficial. The word "good" here is the other word for good, agathos, and that is the idea of intrinsic goodness, structural goodness, and benefit that comes from the goodness. You have beauty and benefit in these two different words. Both words are used in this passage. Keep your behavior excellent, make it beautiful, good that way. Here, good works is beneficial and the idea is if you do it God's way, you benefit. When you turn away from sin, what happens? Your life gets better. Yeah, it's hard. It's hard to fight sin. It's not easy. You need the power of the Holy Spirit. You need Christ's power, union with Christ, to turn away from sin. But when you do, what you find is life. God's way is always better but as you experience that, what are people going to do? The common occurrence is they're not going to applaud your behavior, they're going to revile your good behavior. They're going to slander you. You are going to suffer. You're not going to be harmed ultimately. That's what he's getting at. We're going to look at that next, but you are going to experience suffering. 2 Timothy 3:12 says, "all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution."

Peter makes this clear throughout this letter. Back in chapter 2, I mentioned verse 12, "Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers," that's 2:12. So they're slandering you. This is so much like, almost identical to chapter 3 verse 16. They slander you as evildoers. Chapter 2 verse 15, "For it is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men." What does he mean "silence the ignorance of foolish men"? The ignorance of foolish men is they're slandering you when you do good. But keep doing good. Verse 19, "For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly." The common experience, the common reality for the believer is we experience suffering for doing what is right.

Look at chapter 4, 1 Peter, just to continue this. We saw it in our text, 3:13 to 17, look at 4 chapter 1. How are people going to receive us as we live increasingly godly lives? 4:1, "Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin." Basically, get ready to suffer is what he's saying.

Skip on down to verse 12, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you." I love that, don't be surprised at the fire. It's what you should expect. A fiery ordeal. That's painful. Look at verse 13. What's he talking about? What's the fiery ordeal? "But to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, rejoice so that the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation." Verse 14, "If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer."

Do suffering is a part of it; a common occurrence, experience is that we will suffer. The clear calling, the common experience. And Peter himself had heard Jesus prepare him for this a number of times. Let me show you a couple of New Testament passages, gospel passages. Matthew 10. This is part and parcel of the Christian life. Our calling is to live a holy life, but the common experience is going to be that people reject that. Matthew 10, verse 24. He's been talking about persecution even before this, but we won't go through all of it. You could read the chapter, there's a lot in here. He says in verse 24, "A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master. It is enough for the disciple that he become like his teacher, and the slave like his master. If they have called the head of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign the members of his household!" Look, he's saying, if they called me, they called Jesus Beelzebul, which was a name for basically the most evil way you could describe Jesus, he is essentially, of Satan is what they're saying. "If they said that about Me, how will they talk about My disciples?"

Verse 26, "Therefore do not fear them, for there is nothing concealed that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known." Verse 28, "Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered." I love this. He's talking about how bad things are going to be, but he's reminding us, you know, God is completely aware of what's going on at every moment. He knows how many sparrows there are in the world. He has a count on that. You know, it's like in the old days, you remember when you would go by the McDonald's and it would say how many millions were sold? That's dating myself. You got to billions before a while and then they quit telling us. There's too many to count. Well, more than hamburgers, they're sparrows, and God knows every single sparrow in the universe, every sparrow on the face of the planet. He's got it counted. He knows when one falls. He knows how many hairs are on your head. He certainly knows what you're going through in the moment of intense persecution. He's with you. That's what he's saying. So do not fear you're more valuable than many sparrows. If he knows what's happening to the sparrow, don't be afraid. He's right there watching what's happening to you.

Now, let's turn over to John as we make our way back toward 1 Peter. Go past Mark and Luke to John 15, verse 18. For us to bear up, we have to be realists. We have to understand what we're dealing with and the beauty of biblical Christianity is intensely and completely realistic, and the beauty of it is when you know what is really true, it changes everything because it's not just what you see with your eyes that is true, he also tells us what's true in the unseen realm. But we can face honestly what's out there that we're going to see and that's what he's telling us right now. In chapter 15 verse 18, "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.'" He's saying, remember what I told you back in Matthew 10? "If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also."

Look at chapter 16, verse 1, "These things I have spoken to you so that you may be kept from stumbling. They will make you outcasts from the synagogue, but an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God." It's how mixed up this world is. They think, "We're doing good, we love God, we know God," yet the delusion and darkness of Satan is so great that they will even think they're doing good service to God when they kill you and me, if that were to happen. As believers, that's how wild and out of context and just out of reality the world is. They are blind. "These things they will do because they have not known the Father or Me," he says in verse 3.

All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution because living godly is letting your light shine before men by doing good and will be hated by those who hate God. That is the common experience that we need to be prepared for. Clear calling, you've got to do good, but when you do good, the common occurrence is you're going to experience opposition and hatred. Now, thirdly, a certain truth. A certain truth. Back to our text, 1 Peter 3. "Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good?" The clear calling is to be zealous for what is good, but there will be people who try to harm you. They will make you suffer for the sake of righteousness. But the certain truth is there in the next clause, there's actually one word in the Greek, "blessed." He says, but even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, blessed, you are blessed. That's the idea. It's just one word, makarios. They're trying to harm you and that's where now we see why he did that rhetorical question. The rhetorical question, "Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? Who can harm you," is what he's saying. "Who can harm you if you prove zealous for what is good?" He's sounding a lot like Romans chapter 8, which we read earlier. We didn't read the one verse before, which says if God is for you, who can be against you? Think about that. If God is for you, who can be against you? If God is for you, if God is protecting you, who can harm you? Who?

Now, we have to understand what harm really is. Jesus says they may turn you over and you may be killed physically but don't fear him who can kill the body, fear him who can kill the body and throw the soul into hell. Fear God, which is exactly where he's going to go. We'll look at this next week. It's all about fearing Christ in the moment. But the certainty is, he says, listen, if you could see what is really true, if you can look beyond the natural, you see someone trying to harm you, you see someone inflicting suffering, physical suffering upon you, but in reality, you in this moment are not cursed, you are not abandoned, you are blessed, makarios. This picture is the fullness of God. This is the word that is used in Matthew 5, nine times. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." Blessed, blessed, blessed, blessed, and blessed ending up in verses 10 and 11, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake." And the idea is, oh, how happy, because you have the fullness of God's blessing. This word means to be the recipient of, is the state of being marked by fullness from God. That's what you are when you are experiencing persecution. Doesn't feel like it outwardly. Your body may hurt, your pride may be hurt, your emotions initially may be distraught. No one likes to be rejected. But when you can set your focus on the certain truth, the underlying reality that you are blessed, God is blessing you. In fact, he's standing with you, like he says in chapter 4, the Spirit of God and of glory rests on you when you are being maligned for Christ.

It's like when somebody maligns you for being a Christian, you know what happens? You find that God has just come down in an even more amazing way and he's standing right there with you. I mean, he's always with us, but it's like he says, the Spirit of God and glory rests upon you, there's something profound about the moment when you're being persecuted. I think Paul's got this in mind when he speaks in 2 Timothy about how everyone abandoned him when he was on trial. He says, "You know, Demas has left me. These people love the world or they don't have the kind of strength and faith that they need. No one stood with me at my defense but," what? "The Lord stood with me." He knew God was with him. He knew Christ was standing right there with him and the reality is the certain truth that we need to see is that we are blessed, that is, God is with us, his fullness is with us in the moment.

What a contrast between our circumstances and reality and this is to change everything. This is what enables us to have joy. "Blessed are the poor in spirit. Oh, how happy are those who have nothing." That tells you right off that God's ways are not our ways. The happiest you can become is when you know that you have nothing before God, that you have nothing to offer him, that you see how utterly impoverished you are spiritually. When you see that, when you see you have nothing, you're destitute before God, oh, how happy you are. You have the favor of God. You now know what Jesus said. Remember when he talked about the Pharisee and the publican, the tax collector, the publican and the Pharisee? The Pharisee goes to the temple and he says, "Lord, thank You that I'm not like other men." He's thanking God. I mean, you've got to give him credit for that. He is saying thank you, but, "Thank You that I am not like other men." He's touting his resume. "I tithe, I fast, and I'm not like this wicked guy over here, this publican back over here. Thank You that I'm not like him." And Jesus said the publican, aware of his sin, cannot even look up to heaven, but beats his breast and says, "Have mercy on me, the sinner." The sinner. He sees himself as the sinner, the only sinner, almost as it were. He is aware of how utterly spiritually impoverished and hopeless he is before God. And I love what he says, "Have mercy on me," the Greek actually says, "be propitiated toward me." He's saying, "I have nothing. I don't know how I'm even standing in the temple, but be propitiated. Look at the sacrifice, Father, look at the sacrifice and have mercy on me." And Jesus says, "I tell you, that man went to his house justified." Had nothing to commit himself, but what? The sacrifice. "Nothing in my hand I bring, only to the cross I cling. Look at the cross and have mercy on me."

So when you know you have nothing, you know that you have to look to Jesus for everything and oh, how happy you are. Oh, how happy you are. In finding nothing, in finding that you have nothing in reality, you have nothing, by looking at Christ, you have everything. Everything is in Christ. That's the idea. He's saying, listen, you now are blessed. You have the presence of God with you. You have eternity. You have, according to Matthew 5, he goes on after he said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit," he ends up with, "Blessed are when you are persecuted for righteousness' sake," and he adds two blessings there. "Blessed are you when men cast insults against you, says all sorts of evil against you. They did the same to the prophets. Rejoice and be very glad for," why? "Your reward in heaven is great." They're just really, they're coming at you to harm you. You

know what they're doing? It's like in heaven, they're piling up blessings. They're coming to harm you, they think they're harming you, they may physically beat you, they may physically do damage to you, they may physically take things away from you, but you know what they're doing? In reality, they're not harming you at all, they are adding up to your blessings because you are blessed in Christ.

We read earlier from Romans chapter 5 at the beginning of the service. Neil read that. You have peace with God, you stand in grace. Grace means favor. You're in the position of favor. If you have stopped looking to yourself and said, "Lord, look at the sacrifice, have mercy on me," you stand now in a position of continual favor with God. Nothing but favor. Only favor 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 and a quarter days a year. This is leap year. Every single day, you're in favor. Nothing but favor. Nothing but blessing. When he says, who can be against you if God is for you? The next verse, "If He did not spare his own Son but delivered Him over for us all," gave his Son for you, "how will He not together with Him," that is with Christ, "freely give you all things?" He's saying every moment of every day, God's purpose is to bless you in Christ. I mean, that is, you bank on it, it is 100% true. Every single event, every single trial, every single thing that Satan tries to do to you who are blessed, you who are makarios, everything Satan, every weapon he forms against you will not prosper because you are in this position of being blessed by God. Whatever he throws at you will only redound to your greater benefit. That's the certain truth. Bank on that. Know that. Preach that to yourself in the moment. Preach that to your brothers and sisters in the moment.

It's a reality that we experience the outward, and it's a sad, difficult reality at first when you look at it. I mean, because this world, there's a sense in which there is a sadness about it because the world was made to be perfect. We live in a fallen world and so for us to be light and to be hated by those in darkness is sad and our hearts genuinely can feel sad and rejection by unbelievers is sad. We don't go around looking for it. No, but we should go around doing good and take what comes. Just do good. That's the job today. Do good in every area of my life. Take what comes. and know that as it comes, though it initially looks sad, it's painful, it's always redounding to our greater good.

What Satan means for evil, God means for good. Isn't that amazing? That was true of Joseph before Christ. You know why? Because Christ was coming. Couldn't happen if it wasn't for Jesus coming. God treated Joseph on the basis of Jesus' future sacrifice, and he was able to turn everything around that Satan was trying to do against him and turned it into blessing. And the reality is, listen to this even, the reality is even in this life, it redounds to your good. You say, well, they do things that harm you. Maybe they tortured people in the past, and they have to deal with scars after that. Even that, somehow, is making their life better now because you know why? Let me show you 2 Corinthians chapter 4. We'll end here. I want to show you this in Paul's life because the reality of suffering is real. Physical suffering is real. It's painful. I said earlier the Bible is so realistic. It's not optimistic kind of Pollyanna kind of belief. No, it's realism. Look what Paul says in verse 6, 2 Corinthians 4:6. "For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." Look, what you have if you're a believer is God

has put light and life inside of you. He spoke into you and this is new creation, this is being born again, he looks into the darkness of the sinner's heart and says, "Let there be light," and someone is saved. That's what happens. It's just like when he created the world out of nothing.

Salvation is a miracle of that order. Think about that. It's not a small thing to save a sinner but look what he says next, "But we have this treasure," that is the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ, the reality of a relationship with God, "we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves," earthly vessels, clay pots. We have this treasure in a clay pot, most surprising place to put treasure. You would never put treasure in a clay pot, but God has done it and look what he says, "we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed." We really experience suffering and Paul experienced so much of it, afflicted, crushed, persecuted, struck down, but not overcome, not destroyed. "Always," verse 10, "carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body." This passage is a great passage to meditate on. I don't have time to unpack it. Let me just point this out, verse 16 to 18. He's talking about the suffering we go through, what happens in us. This is what I'm saying, in this life there's blessing. Not just, he's going to say there's blessing in the future, but listen to what he, there's blessing now and in the future. He starts with blessing in the future. Verse 16, "Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying," our outer man is being beat down, "our outer man is decaying yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison," more reward in heaven, verse 17. Verse 18, "while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."

Here is the blessing in the moment. When you suffer for righteousness' sake, when you are persecuted, the reality is, rewards are accruing in heaven, Jesus is with you, and God opens your eyes. This is it. God opens your eyes to see what really matters. You see with greater clarity the things which are not seen. Suffering does that in general, but persecution in an extraordinary way. So in the moment, you may have had damage to your body, they may have taken goods away from you, but you know what happened? They've increased your reward in heaven, and they've increased your ability to see Jesus and God's hand in your life. They've made you stronger, mighty in the Lord. This is what he's talking about, Romans 8:31 to 39. In all these things, we're led like sheep to the slaughter, but in all these things, we are more than conquerors. So when you know this, when we know this, we can endure. We can overcome if we see things as they really are. What a glorious Savior that would save sinners like you and me and then walk with us and teach us these things. Let's be faithful to him.

Let's pray.

Father, how grateful we are for what You've done for us in Christ. Lord, we know we confess how weak we are in faith, Lord, how fearful we are, and we're not to be afraid of

anything else if we fear You correctly, if we see Your hand. Keep opening our eyes to see Your glory. Make us people who are strong and courageous, who abide in Your word, who live lives of increasing goodness before a dark and dying world. And as we see in the next verses, Lord, it makes an opportunity for people to see what's real in us and to get saved. Even those who hate us, who revile us, in many cases, their hearts will be broken and they'll be brought to bow the knee to Christ. Help us, Lord. Make us walk in a manner worthy of the great calling with which we've been called. We pray in Jesus' name, amen.